

“This Is Where the Action Is”

John 1:1-14

Last week, I said that there are many wonderful things about opening gifts at Christmas. It is a time for creating so many memories. The common perception is that the tearing into gifts on Christmas morning is where the action is.

The funny thing is that, when I look back on the Christmas Eve’s and Christmas mornings of my youth (and even my adult life) my memories are not of the gifts I received. Looking back, I can only specifically remember three gifts I ever got. When I was in grade school, I got a Tonka bulldozer from my grandparents. That was when toys were real. It was made of real metal, had sharp edges. It was dangerous.

I also remember getting a red International Harvester Tractor – a 1466. It was metal. I still have it. I planted and harvested many a living room in my youth with that tractor. Mom used to love it when I would plant the entire living room with real shelled corn and then not harvest it for days. But I remember that gift.

The other gift I specifically remember is this wedding ring. Malinda surprised me with it. My first ring got lost around the time Annalisa started walking. We think Annalisa ate it. It was on the dresser in our bedroom, then it wasn’t. Even when we moved, it was nowhere to be found. We have always said our children are worth their weight in gold. It seems there could be some literal truth to that.

Other than those gifts, I have only vague recollection of images of wrapping paper or empty boxes.

The gifts were never the focus. I remember the candle light service each year – which is still one of my favorite events. I remember being in church on Christmas Day (and from about 4th grade on, I was always robed up and sitting up front assisting in some way). So I could look out and see

all the kids who brought their new Christmas toys to church. For some reason, parents thought that Matchbox cars were a safe toy for their children to bring. The people in the five rows in front of them didn't think so.

My favorite was when parents would not realize that certain new dolls came with the ability to make noise. That amused me in my youth – and apparently I still haven't grown up.

But as I look back and ponder Christmas, more than anything, I remember being in God's House. To this day, when people ask me if I am ready for Christmas, I tend to offer answers that puzzle and confuse the inquirer, because my answer will never have anything to do with the purchasing of gifts.

Leading up to today, when asked, "Are you ready for Christmas to come?" as we have seen throughout the Advent Season, the more appropriate question would be, "Are you ready for Christ to come?" Christmas has come and we celebrate. And it is appropriate that we give gifts. Those small gifts remind us that our Father in heaven has given the ultimate gift.

Christ has come. The Son of God has come in the flesh. As John says, "The Word became flesh and dwelt among us." And He has taken the burden of your sin upon His shoulders and has carried it to the cross.

That is what we celebrate today. That is what we celebrate every time we gather together as the children of God. That is the reason that, when I think of Christmas, I think of being in God's House. This is where the action is.

I have truly enjoyed how the schedule has fallen this year. This Divine Service marks the fifth opportunity in four days for us to gather and celebrate and share the story of what Christ has done for each of us. It is worth more than gold. It is worth more than any gift found under your tree this year or any year.

The joy of Christmas is found here in what we do in God's House. The joy of Christmas is found here in the broken body and shed blood of Christ our Lord. I pray that when you think of Christmas that you think of being here. Because this is where the action is. Amen.